



WESTPORT CONNECTICUT
REGISTRARS OF VOTERS
TOWN HALL, 110 MYRTLE AVENUE
WESTPORT, CT 06880
TELEPHONE (203)341-1115

Spoken

Testimony of Marla Cowden, Registrar (203) 341-1116 | mcowden@westportct.gov

Proposed S.B. No. 778 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE REDUCTION OF POLLING PLACES FOR A PRIMARY.

H.B. No. 6427 - AN ACT CONCERNING POLLING PLACES FOR PRIMARIES.

On March 5, 2013, the Westport Representative Town Meeting passed the following:

RESOLVED: That upon the request of Registrar of Voters, the following sense of the meeting resolution is hereby adopted:

"We the members of the Representative Town Meeting support state legislative action to reduce the number of polling places used in primaries."

These bills both address allowing Registrars to consolidate polling places for primaries. Reducing polling places reduces costs. In Westport, we estimate the savings for most primaries to be \$15,000 to \$25,000 depending upon the type of primary. Westport's districting structure currently requires seven districts in state/federal election years and nine districts in local years. We have experienced many primaries where turnout was below 1000 voters. Most of the primaries we conduct could be accommodated with a multi-line single polling place.

While I am in favor of allowing consolidation, I have concerns about some of the provisions of these two bills. S.B. 778 requires consent from the candidates. While the numbers, under 900 total voters, would have suggested consolidation for Westport's 2012 Presidential Primary, I believe getting consent from all the national candidates would have been difficult, if not impossible.

In H.B. 6427, I am concerned that the tight time frames create a greater opportunity for voter confusion. I also am concerned about allowing a candidate who opposes consolidation to remain anonymous and yet affect the conduct of an election. This seems to be in conflict with state FOIA statutes.

I would like to suggest that consolidation be accomplished with agreement of the Registrars and approval of a plan of consolidation by the local legislative body, that plan encompassing the same ten year span as redistricting.

This would allow for citizen input at the legislative hearing of the plan. It would eliminate any opportunity for poll consolidation to be used in a manner that would benefit or harm any particular candidate. Such plan would meet the goal of limiting voter confusion by spelling out many years in advance where consolidation would occur.